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Citation for published version (APA):

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The acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER: the role of background language(s)

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Introduction

This study looks at transfer from L1 French and L1 English to the L2 Dutch. We specifically look at the ability to judge and imitate morphosyntactic and semantic structures with the quantitative pronoun ER.

Materials

Grammaticality Judgement Task
3 experimental conditions (N=30), 15 fillers
Sentence imitation task
3 experimental conditions (N=12), 8 fillers
Dutch Vocabulary Task, Digit Span, Questionnaire

Comparison results French-Dutch and English-Dutch

SI
Dutch
L1 French
L1 English

Syntax
✓ presence
positive
positive
✓ absence
negative
positive

Semantics
✓ indefiniteness
positive
positive
✓ definiteness
negative
positive

✓ non-presuppositionality
positive
positive
✓ presuppositionality
negative
positive

Comparison results French-English

GJT
Dutch
L1 French
L1 English

Syntax
✓ presence
positive
positive
✓ absence
negative
positive

Semantics
✓ indefiniteness
positive
positive
✓ definiteness
negative
positive

✓ non-presuppositionality
positive
positive
✓ presuppositionality
negative
positive

Discussion

Our predictions were based on Dutch being the L2 for both groups. However, all of the L1 French participants speak English too, and since all participants live in The Netherlands they come into contact with English on a regular basis. This leads to the idea that Dutch is in fact their L3.

By considering Dutch as an L3 for the L1 French group, we implemented the L2 Status Factor (Bardel and Falk 2007) that claims that the L2 acts as a filter, thereby blocking transfer from the L1 at the syntactic level. Thus, the L2 might have a bigger impact on learning the L3 than the L1. In that case we do not expect to find significant differences between the L1 French and the L1 English groups.

No significant difference between the L1 French and L1 English groups have been found in the GJT, thereby confirming the L2 Status Factor.

Conclusion

Our goal was to look at the role of L1 French and L1 English on the L2 acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER. However, we found that for the L1 English group Dutch is considered the ‘real L2’, and for the L1 French group English should be considered the L2. We therefore confirm the L2 Status Factor.

References and Acknowledgements


We would like to thank Tom Rooper and Jason Rothman for their useful comments and discussion on this research.